

COUNSELLING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY? SURVEY OF 'TITLE' USE

August 2017

Author: Tina Hill-Art Reg MBACP

Purpose:

To understand why therapy practitioners (counsellors and psychotherapists) decide on their title (in an era of non-regulation and no discernible definitive description of either title in current usage by any professional body or government department) and to understand the general attitudes to the titles from the differing title users.

Method:

Anonymous survey, using 'Survey Monkey' on-line tool circulated to LinkedIn and Facebook groups of counselling and psychotherapy professionals. (130 + people responded, but only the first 100 responder's results were captured due to Survey Monkey restrictions.)

CONTENTS:

Page 1: Introduction, purpose and method

Page 2: Summary and basic statistics

Page 3: Attitudes from group who use the title 'Counsellor' and why they DON'T use the title 'Psychotherapist':

Page 4: Attitudes from group who use the title 'Psychotherapist', and why they DON'T use the title 'Counsellor'

Page 5 -10 The numbers- detailed statistics / feedback

SUMMARY

Basic statistics:

- The responders gender % mix appears to reflect the professions in general.
- Responses from those who describe their profession as 'counsellor' and those who describe as 'psychotherapist' was almost even
- Responders of each 'title' use who 'had considered which title to use' was quite evenly split
- The majority of responders came from the 'six or more years' practice' category

Attitudes to these titles, gleaned from interpretation of the free text feedback:

There is a relationship shown between 'words used' in core training and 'title used' in practice; though use of 'Psychotherapist' increased for those with longer time in practice (where they may have also, but not necessarily, undertaken further study)

Male practitioners use 'Psychotherapist' rather than 'Counsellor' far more than Female practitioners do (other / undisclosed were equal)

There is an overall belief from practitioners of all stripes, that the words 'Counselling / Counsellor' have more negative connotations attached to them, although they feel that clients respond more favourably to title 'Counsellor'

There appears to be an understanding /belief / perception that:

- 'Psychotherapy' is 'more professional' and 'does more' than 'Counselling'
- That to practice as a psychotherapist you must have 'more training' or be 'more experienced'

These perceptions (by responders of all titles) are strong, despite there being no prescribed training regulation or discernible stated difference in title descriptions currently available other than personal choice (i.e. of training modality, ergo; course title) or any discernible difference in what 'each' actually does, outside of context (i.e. mental health inpatient setting, private practice, statutory sector etc.).

Overall there is some indication that cultural background lends a difference to the perception of titles

Those who describe themselves as 'both' feel 'they are interchangeable', 'there is no discernible difference', but acknowledge that 'Psychotherapist' is seen as 'a more credible'

The survey analysis made me aware that for greater clarity I could have asked:

If you changed title what did you change to/from and when'

If you used words such as 'greater depth' / 'deeper level' please say what this means to you

How satisfied are you with your current case load (want more, less?)

Are you in private practice or other setting (state nature of 'other')

Attitudes from each group of 'title' user responders:

Those who use the title 'Counsellor' and why they DON'T use the title 'Psychotherapist':

- **Counselling students on placement and counsellors with up to two years' practice:** Perceive 'Counsellor' as less intimidating, less clinical & more familiar for clients than 'psychotherapist'
- **Counsellors with three - five years' practice:** Overall perceive that 'Counsellor' is seen as less intimidating / less medical model / authoritarian for clients than 'psychotherapist'.

It is noted that some thought is now being given at this stage of practice. There are signs of uncertainty about what qualification is needed to use 'psychotherapist', or if a particular training model applies. There is negative mention of 'expert', inflated ego', 'entitlement' regarding 'psychotherapist', but also an acknowledgment that it may seem more professional ('use in academic circles')

- **Counsellors with six or more years in practice:** Overall perceive no distinction between the titles.

It is noted that there seems increased confidence in the lack of distinction between the two titles at this stage in practice. 'Psychotherapist' is still seen as intimidating and counselling as more user friendly.

There appears an understanding that what most counsellors actually DO is both, but concerns for misleading clients if use 'Psychotherapist'.

There is an acknowledgment that whilst it may feel 'pretentious', they are more likely to use 'psychotherapist' on a CV. There is a lack of knowledge about the nature /content of 'Psychotherapy' training (they 'train in depth in one theory') and a link to 'Freud' & 'analytical couch' appear to be connected to the term 'Psychotherapist'.

Attitudes from each group of 'title' user responders –

Those who use the title 'Psychotherapist', and why they DON'T use the title 'Counsellor':

- **Psychotherapy students on placement and Psychotherapists with up to two years' practice:** Overall perceive that 'Psychotherapist' = more professional and 'does more'.

There is evidence that there is a lack of knowledge about the nature/content of counselling or counselling training ('like giving advice').

- **Psychotherapists with three-five years' practice:** Perceive that Psychotherapy is 'more than', 'deeper', 'more sophisticated'. Some at this stage in their practice use both titles in marketing.

Some evidence of lack of knowledge of the training requirements of counsellors ('anyone can study/ not everyone is/').

- **Psychotherapists with six or more years' practice:** At this stage, more Psychotherapists perceive that Psychotherapy and Counsellor are interchangeable, and many have at this stage had additional post – dip training that informed their title choice. Still an overall perception that a Psychotherapist is working with 'more interventions', at a 'deeper level' / 'longer / greater number of sessions' and with 'more complexities' and that 'Psychotherapist' has a higher status, and is cool! (I thank whoever that was for your honesty!)

There are some comments in this section that indicate a lack of knowledge around the non-regulation of EITHER titles; i.e. "anyone can set up as a counsellor" (anyone can set up as a psychotherapist!) and a lack of knowledge about counselling course requirements: 'counsellors can practice without personal therapy' (as can psychotherapists, and psychologists).

Detailed statistics:

Responder's stated Gender:

Female	Male	DIDN'T STATE /other
77	19	2

Describes their profession to others as:

'COUNSELLOR'	'PSYCHOTHERAPIST'	'OTHER'
43	48	5

'other' = 'Both' x 3, 'Therapist' x 1, 'Hypno-Psychotherapist' x 1

Use of title by gender:

	counsellor	psychotherapist	other	%
female	39	35	8	43%
male	4	13	0	76%
other/not disclosed	1	1	0	

Had the practitioner previously thought about their title /use of title?

Title used	No	Yes
Counsellors	15	18
Psychotherapist	11	15
Both	1	5
Hypno-psychotherapist		1
Therapist	1	

Relationship between title used and core training:

		Described title as			
Training Included words:	Total:	Counsellor	Psychotherapist	both	Other
Both	11	5	5	2	
Counselling	54	38	11	6	
Psychotherapy	31		29	1	Hypno-psychotherapy
Social work	2		2		
Relationship Therapy	1	1			
Hypnotherapy	1	1			
Psychologist	1		1		

Number of respondents split by years of practice:

STUDENT -2 YRS	3-5 YEARS	6+
13	28	56

Description of their chosen title, split by years of practice

Chosen title	student -2 yrs	3-5 years	6 years +
Counselling	8	14	19
Psychotherapy	4	7	33
Both	0	3	5
Hypnotherapy	1		
Therapist		1	

GENERAL ATTITUDES FROM ALL RESPONSES (with number of mentions)

'PSYCHOTHERAPY' /'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' HAS NEGATIVE CONNOTATION IN ANSWER	'COUNSELLING'/'COUNSELLOR' HAS NEGATIVE / 'LESS THAN' CONNOTATION IN ANSWER
= 24	= 36

There appears to be an understanding /belief / perception that:

'PSYCHOTHERAPY' = 'MORE PROFESSIONAL'
13

PSYCHOTHERAPY 'DOES MORE' (THAN COUNSELLING)
39

And that to practice as a psychotherapist, you need to be:

MORE /TRAINED EXPERIENCED
24

And that:

'COUNSELLOR' = BETTER PUBLIC PERCEPTION/UNDERSTANDING OF ROLE	'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' = BETTER PUBLIC PERCEPTION/UNDERSTANDING OF ROLE
19	11

GENERAL ATTITUDES OF 'COUNSELLORS' TO 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST 'TITLE: (split by title and years of practice):

counsellors (placement students or those with up to 2 years' in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'Psychotherapists':

NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT
GENERAL PUBLIC UNDERSTAND 'COUNSELLOR' BETTER
FEEL IT FEELS MORE INTIMIDATING
PEOPLE ARE MORE FAMILIAR WITH 'COUNSELLOR' AS A DESCRIPTION. PSYCHOTHERAPIST SOUNDS CLINICAL

Reasons **counsellors** (those with 3-5 years' in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'Psychotherapists':

DEPENDS WHO I'M TALKING TO. PSYCHOTHERAPIST CAN BE INTIMIDATING, CLIENTS MORE ACCUSTOMED TO 'COUNSELLOR'. IN ACADEMIC SETTING, I USE 'PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COUNSELLOR' WHICH CAPTURES THE NATURE OF MY INTEGRATIVE WORK
NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT
FEEL 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' IS OFF-PUTTING TO CLIENTS, FEEL ITS MORE AMERICAN TERM HINTING AT LYING ON A COUCH BEING ANALYSED. I HAVE KNOWN OF COUNSELLORS USING THIS, IT SEEMS TO INFLATE THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY & EGO
I PRACTICE IN COUNSELLING FIELD OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS, NOT IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOTHERAPY
COUNSELLOR SOUNDS MORE ACCESABLE, LESS MEDICAL
I DIDN'T THINK I WAS ENTITLED TO
MATCHES MY TRAINIING. PSYCHOTHERAPIST CAN INTIMATE CLIENTS/THEIR FAMILY
FEEL 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' WOULD PUT ME AS 'THE EXPERT' AND THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT TO BE SEEN AS.
QUALIFICATION STATE4S PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COUNSELLOR, TOO MUCH OF A MOUTHFUL SO I SHORTEN IT TO 'COUNSELLOR'
NOT SURE WHAT CREDENTIALS ARE NEEDED TO BE A PSYCHOTHERAPIST
MY QUALIFICATION SAYS COUNSELLING
I ASSOCIATE PSYCHPOTHERAPEST WITH SOMETHING I DON'T FEEL I'M TRAINED IN, I WAS TRAINED IN HUMANISTIC COUNSELLING
PSYCHOTHERAPIST HOLDS CONNOTATIONS OF A MORE MEDICALISED MODEL WHICH IS NOT IN KEEPING WITH WHAT I FEEL COUNSELLING TO BE. COUNSELLING SEEMS A MORE HOLISTIC TERM.

Reasons **counsellors** (those with 6 years' + in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'Psychotherapists':

DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS A MEANINGFUL DISTINCTION AND 'COUNSELLOR' IS LESS PRETENTIOUS AND FOR MANY CLIENTS PROBABLY LESS INTIMIDATING
NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT
I DIDN'T DO A PSYCHOTHERAPY TRAINING, THOUGH I DO WORK AT A DEEP A LEVEL AS THE PSYCHOTHERAPISTS I KNOW, AND I DO LONG TERM WORK. INTEGRITY IS IMPORTANT TO ME
DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS A DIFFERENCE, PERSONAL CHOICE OF TERM. FEEL 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' MAY BE USED BY THOSE WITH A MEDICAL BACKGROUND- IE PSYCHIATRISTS
PSYCHOTHERAPY FEELS LIKE SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE 'FIXED', WHEREAS COUNSELLING OFFERS A SHARED SPACE FOR HEALING AND POSITIVE GROWTH
MY TRAINING WAS IN COUNSELLING AND I'D HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT MISLEADING CLIENTS
FRIENDLIER AND BETTER UNDERSTOOD BY PUBLIC
I USE BOTH IN MY MARKETING AS I DO OFFER LONGER TERM DEEP WORK
SOME MIGHT FIND IT INTIMIDATING
PSYCHOTHERAPISTS UNDERGO MORE IN DEPTH TRAINING IN ONE THEORY (IE FREUD)
USE BOTH- 'COUNSELLOR' IN GENERAL CONVERSATION, (AS 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' CAN SOUND A BIT PRETENTIOUS).
MORE LIKELY TO USE PSYCHOTHERAPIST ON A CV

GENERAL ATTITUDES OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS TO 'COUNSELLOR' TITLE: split by title and years of practice):

Reasons **Psychotherapists** (placement students or those with up to 2 years in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'counsellors':

COUNSELLOR' IS A MORE GENERAL TERM USED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. PSYCHOTHERAPIST SAYS IT AS IT IS
PSYCHOTHERAPIST FITS THE BETTER DESCRIPTION AND HOLDS MORE PROFESSIONAL WEIGHT BEHIND IT
PSYCHOTHERAPY IS MORE THAN COUNSELLING. COUNSELLING SOUNDS LIKE MORE GENERAL GIVING ADVICE, PSYCHOTHERAPY INCLUDES METHODS THAT WERE CREATED TO TREAT PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS

Reasons **Psychotherapists** (those with up to 3 -5 years in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'Counsellors':

COUNSELLOR' SEEMS LESS INFORMED, LESS SOPHISTICATED
I USE BOTH ON OCCASIONS
THE WORK I DO GOS DEEPER THAN COUNSELLING. HOWEVER, MY MARKETING USES 'COUNSELLING ' WHICH RELLECTS THE TERM OF MY TRAINING COURSE
NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT
TRAINING IS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY, INCLUDED GENERAL /BASIC COUNSELLING. TRAINING COMPLETED ALLOWS ME TO PROVIDE 'MORE THAN' COUNSELLING. I HAVE A BACKGROUND IN PSYCHOLOGY.
ANYONE CAN STUDY /LEARN 'COUNSELLING SKILLS' NOT EVERYONE IS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST
I AM NOT A COUNSELLOR

Reasons **Psychotherapists** (those with up to 6+ years in practice) gave for not calling themselves 'Counsellors': (next page)

USE 'COUNSELLOR' IN SHORT TERM WORK, AND 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' IN LONGER TERM / THAT REQUIRES DEPTH THERAPY
ACCURATE DESCRIPTION RELATIVE TO THE LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION COMPLETED IF I HAD NOT COMPLETED A POST DIP PSYCH TRAINING I WOULD USE 'COUNSELLOR'
IT DEPENDS WHO I'M TALKING TO. PEOPLE PERCEIVE 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' TO HAVE A HIGHER STATUS, BUT THEY ARE INTERCHANGEABLE. MANY COURSE AND PROFESSIONAL BODY (IE BACP) HOLD BOTH TERMS IN SIMILAR VALUE IN TERMS OF PROFESSIONALISM AND TRAINING. MY TRAINING COVERED BOTH, II THINK IT COMES DOWN TO PERSONAL PREFERENCE AND CLIENT PERCEPTION
I USED TO CALL MYSELF COUNSELLOR, BUT THE TERM IS BROAD AND MANY UNQUALIFIED PEOPLE DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS 'COUNSELLOR'. THE TERM (COUNSELLOR) IS USED IN MANY DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. USING PSYCHOTHERAPIST BETTER DESCRIBES WHAT I DO. MY ACCREDITATION CERT STATES COUNSELLOR/PSYCHOTHERAPIST
GREATER DEPTH I WORK AT WITH CLIENTS THAN COUNSELLING. USE CPCAB SERVICE LEVELS AS A GUIDE.
NOT THOUGHT ABOUT IT
SOUNDS MORE CLINICAL
I COMPLETED A HIGHER POST DIP TRAINING
PSYCHOTHERAPY IS MORE INTRICATE AND BASED MORE ON ONGOING ASSESSMENT I THINK, IT SEEMS TO BE MORE DYNAMIC
DON'T USE COUNSELLING AS ITS SEEN IN LOWER LEVEL (in other country). LIFE COACHES ARE STARTING TO USE THE TERM
USE BOTH- 'COUNSELLOR' IS MORE BROADLY KNOWN, BUT AS I HAVE A SPECIALIST MODALITY TRAINING FEEL THIS IS MORE THAN A COUNSELLOR. THERE ARE LOTS OF CROSS OVERS AND GREY AREAS & FEEL THAT THE TRADITIONAL DESCRIPTIONS ARE OUTDATED AS PEOPLE ARE MORE INTEGRATIVE NOW
I USE 'PSYCHOTHERAPY' IN PRIVATE PRACTICE BECAUSE OF MY POST-DIP TRAINING. I EXPECT TO WORK WITH COMPLEX CLIENTS (IE TRAUMA /GRIEF) ALSO FOR CLIENTS WITH A MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS. I ADDITIONALLY WORK IN A MENTAL HEALTH CLINICAL SETTING IN A SENIOR ROLE /SUPERVISING
SOUNDS MORE PROFESSIONAL. COUNSELLING CAN HAVE TEA & SYMPATHY CONNOTATIONS. I USE COUNSELLING FOR SHORT TERM WORK AND PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR LONG TERM. IT SOUNDS COOLER TO BE A PSYCHOTHERAPIST.
I THINK ABOUT MY WORK AS FACILITATING ANOTHERS THOUGHTS AND PROVIDING PHILOSOPHICALLY INFORMED REFLECTION
COUNSELLING USUALLY APPLIES TO THE NUMBER OF SESSIONS- 6-12 IS COUNSELLING, MORE THAN THAT IS PSYCHOTHERAPY. PSYCHOTHERAPY REFERS TO LONGER MORE IN DEPTH WORK
COUNSELLING IS MORE PERSON CENTERED- PSYCHOTHERAPY USES MORE INTERVENTIONS & PSYCHOEDUCATION
COUNSELLOR = SHORT TERM WORK & DOESN'T HAVE EXPERIENCE TO WORK ON LONGER TERM CLINICAL ISSUES. PSYCHOTHERAPY AIMS TO FIND ROOTS AND BEGINNINGS OF ISSUE, NOT JUST HOW TO MANAGE THEM NOW. ALSO CONSIDER PSYCHOTHERAPISTS WOULD HAVE RECEIVED THERAPY THEMSELVES FOR MANY MORE YEARS, AS MANY COUNSELLORS CAN NOW QUALIFY WITHOUT PERSONAL THERAPY
COUNSELLORS NOT REQUIRED TO HAVE OWN THERAPY, PSYCHOTHERAPISTS TEND TO. MOST COUNSELLING IS IN THE 'HERE & NOW' BUT PSYCHOTHERAPY MIGHT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CHILDHOOD AND DEVELOPMENTAL ELEMENTS, AND BE LONGER TERM
I USE MANY TECHNIQUES BEYOND CLASSICAL COUNSELLING SKILLS
BECAUSE I AM A UKCP REGISTERED PSYCHOTHERAPIST
LONGER MORE IN DEPTH WORK THAN COUNSELLING
IN CULTURAL BACKGROUND, PSYCHOTHERAPIST IS MORE WIDELY RECOGNISED
SOMETIMES USE COUNSELLOR AS MORE USUAL FOR SOME PEOPLE
I DON'T USE COUNSELLING AS I TRAINED AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND NOT A COUNSELLOR THE TRAINING IS VERY DIFFERENT
I'M NOT A COUNSELLOR, THAT WOULD BE LIKE GIVING ADVICE. I PROVIDE A HEALING SPACE TO DISCOVER, HEAL AND GROW.

I TRAINED AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST, I HAVE A POST DIP HIGHER QUALIFICATION. COUNSELLING IS SHORT TERM AND SOLUTION FOCUSED. PSYCHOTHERAPY WORKS AT A DEEPER LEVEL.
--

I WORK WITH TRAUMA WHERE CONVENTIONAL COUNSELLING APPROACHES ARE LESS EFFECTIVE

I USE BOTH BUT CORRECT TITLE IS 'PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COUNSELLOR'. ADDED FURTHER TRAINING IN ADDITIONAL THEORIES

COUNSELLOR IS SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS

CULTURAL BACKGROUND HAS COUNSELLING SEEN AS MORE OF A COACHING EXPERIENCE, IE CAREER COUNSELLING. AND PSYCHOTHERAPY IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE A DEEPER LEVEL THERAPEUTIC EXPERIENCE

GENERAL ATTITUDES OF COUNSELLOR /PSYCHOTHERAPISTS TO TITLES (split by years of practice):

Reasons those who use both **Psychotherapist & Counsellor** (those with up to 3 -5 years in practice) gave for using both:

I USE BOTH. THEY ARE INTERCHANGEABLE

BOTH AS HAVE LEVEL 4 DIP IN COUNSELLING, AND LEVEL 5 DIP IN PSYCHODYNAMIC COUNSELLING

Reasons those who use both **Psychotherapist & Counsellor** (those with up to 6+ years in practice) gave for using both:

SOME PEOPLE RELATE TO THE WORD COUNSELLOR SO IT HELPS TO DESCRIBE WHAT I DO. 'COUNSELLOR' WORD IS OVERUSED IN OTHER PROFESSIONS, IE DEBT COUNSELLOR. PEOPLE HAVE THOUGHT 'COUNSELLOR' MEANT 'TEA & A CHAT' WHICH UNDERMINES SERIOUS NATURE OF THE WORK, AND UNDERMINES ME PROFESSIONALLY. I KNOW SOMEONE WHO WON'T USE 'PSYCHOTHERAPIST' AS SEES THAT AS PRESCRIBING TRADITIONALLY IN THE UK, PSYCHOTHERAPY REFERRED TO PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK. IT DEPENDS ON WHERE AND WITH WHOM I'M WORKING. SHORT TERM WORK TENDS TO BE COUNSELLING. EAP'S TEND TO REFER TO 'COUNSELLING'.
--

USE BOTH IN MARKETING, BUT USE PSYCHOTHERAPIST WHEN FILLING FORMS AS FEEL IT HAS MORE CREDABILITY

I BELIEVE YOU NEED TO TRAIN FURTHER, THOUGH WE COVERED BOTH IN TRAINING.
--

I USE COUNSELLOR AS THAT WAS THE TITLE OF MY CORE TRAINING, I USE PSYCHOTHERAPIST AS IT BETTER DESCRIBES HOW I WORK

END